IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval method for retrieving a 3D model similar to the specified 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database, the method comprising:

displaying a plurality of 3D models, the plurality of 3D models as a whole having a ~~hierarchial~~ hierarchical structure;

specifying one 3D model [[of]] belonging to the hierarchical structure as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of 3D models displayed[[,]];

allowing the user ~~being able~~ to change [[to]] the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made, ~~with a successive operation~~by successive designating of the designated 3D model;

acquiring the feature values of the 3D model specified as the retrieval key from the database;

acquiring the feature values of the 3D model stored in the database as objects to be retrieved;

calculating the similarity between the 3D model specified as the retrieval key and 3D models stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of the both of the acquired feature values;

sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

displaying a 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting.

2. (Previously Presented) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the hierarchial structure is a tree structure.

3-5. (Cancelled)

6. (Previously Presented) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein each of the 3D models has attribute information, and

the displaying the 3D model includes displaying attribute information corresponding to the 3D model at the same time.

7-9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval system for retrieving a 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database, the system comprising a computer and a display and at least one of a keyboard and a mouse,

wherein the computer causes the display to display a plurality of 3D models, the 3D models as a whole having a ~~hierarchial~~ hierarchical structure;

wherein the computer comprises:

a specifying section configured to specify one 3D model [[of]] belonging to the hierarchical structure as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of 3D models displayed with [[the]] at least one of the keyboard [[and]] or the mouse[[,]];

and configured to allow the user ~~being able~~ to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made, ~~with a successive operation~~by successive designating of the designated 3D model;

a retrieval key feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the 3D model specified as the retrieval key from the database;

a retrieval object feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the 3D models stored as objects to be retrieved in the database;

a degree-of-similarity computing section configured to calculate the similarity between the 3D model specified as the retrieval key and 3D models stored as objects to be

retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of the both of the acquired feature values; and

a sorting section for sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity, and

wherein the computer causes the display to display the 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting.

11. (Cancelled)

12. (New) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein designating one of the plurality of 3D models is a clicking on a designated 3D model displayed.

13. (New) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the hierarchical structure has a plurality of levels of the hierarchy and each level has at least one 3D model and is connected with another level by at least one 3D model.

14. (New) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, further comprising allowing the user to move the specified level of the hierarchy toward a higher level of the hierarchy than a present level by successive designating of the designated 3D model.